



BIRINCHI KUMAR BARUA

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.  
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

# Birinchi Kumar Barua

Lalit Kumar Barua



SAHITYA AKADEMI

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## Life and Career

Birinchi Kumar Barua was one of the outstanding men of letters of national standing in Assam in modern times. A scholar of Pali and Prakrit, an historian of culture in the broadest sense of the term, a pioneer in research in Indian folklore, a distinguished teacher of comparative literature, Birinchi Kumar Barua was also a creative writer, whose two novels are representative of what is best in that genre in modern Assamese literature. Indeed, it is the rare combination of multi-disciplinary scholarship, covering a whole range from classics and ancient history to folklore, with literary creative work which gives his life and work a lasting significance. Therefore, his untimely passing away at a comparatively early age while he was in the fullness of powers has been an irreparable loss.

Barua was born on October 8, 1908 at Nowgong, then a small town in central Assam. His ancestral family, known in olden times as the family of Kharangi Baruwas enjoyed a position of authority and prestige during the days of the Ahom Kings in Assam. The ancestral home of the family was at Puranigudam, one of the advanced villages, about 15 kilometres away from Nowgong town.

He was born at that moment of time when the social scenario was slowly changing in Assam. The entire period from the end of the 19th Century to the beginning of the 20th had been a time of transition in Assam. The British Rule had by then consolidated itself. Several important socio-economic developments took place— improvement in the

transport system through the Railways was one of them. A modicum of economic enterprise was seen mainly in the opening of tea gardens in Upper Assam by representatives of the Assamese gentry. The educated Assamese now set much store by higher education and social progress. Bijoyram Barua, father of Birinchi Kumar Barua, represented this enlightened section who wanted to go along with social change.

There was also a new sense of confidence in the cultural field. Modern Assamese literature had come into its own. In the hands of great creative writers like Laksminath Bezbaroa and Chandra Kumar Agarwalla Assamese Language could become the creative medium of a national resurgence. The first phase of the Assamese literary Renaissance known as the 'Jonaki' (a monthly journal) age was already over.

Bijoyram Barua had seven children : five sons and two daughters in all. The eldest of them was Dr. Lalit Kumar Barua who as a doctor became widely known for his philanthropic activities through the Sankara Mission. Another brother was Dr. Sushil Kumar Barua who as a distinguished geologist served as the Director of Geology and Mining of the Govt. of Assam.

A diligent and meritorious student from early on, Birinchi Kumar Barua had his early education in Nowgong M.V. School and the Government High School, Nowgong. It was characteristic of him that he did not confine himself to reading his text books only. He established a small library with shelves of books kept in a room in the Nowgong Dramatic Club and brought out a monthly magazine of which he was main contributor as well as the editor.

Bijoyram Barua, who was a post-master in the postal department had to move from place to place leaving behind his family at Nowgong. However there were occasions when the children accompanied him to far-off places. Thus Birinchi Kumar Barua once visited Chittagong and saw the Buddhist

Vihara there, the occasion making a lasting impression on his mind. Birinchi Kumar Barua was still a minor when his father Bijoyram Barua passed away in 1924. For sometime the family was in dire strait. None of the brothers had completed their studies. Lalit Kumar Barua was still a medical student while Sushil Kumar Barua was still studying in Cotton College.

Birinchi Kumar Barua passed his Matriculation Examination in the first division in 1928 and got himself admitted to Presidency College, Calcutta. He became a boarder in the Eden Hindu Hostel. Dr. Rohini Kumar Barua of Dibrugarh (later Dean of Science faculty in the Guwahati University) was one of his roommates there. Among his contemporaries in the Presidency College was Nikhil Chakravarty, the distinguished journalist.

Barua passed the Intermediate Arts examination in the first division in 1930 and joined the B.A. course in the Presidency College with honours in Pali. He passed the B.A. examination in 1932 with first class honours securing the coveted Ishan Scholarship for having secured the highest marks among the honours candidates of the year. In 1934, Birinchi Kumar Barua passed the M.A. examination securing first position in the first class. His brilliant showing in the examination apart, he impressed his mentors like Dr. Benimadhab Barua with his grasp over the Pali texts and his grounding in classical literature. Besides, his years in the Presidency College opened up a whole new vista of intellectual experience which was to bear fruit in the later years.

After a brief stint as a teacher in the Nowgong Govt. High School, Birinchi Kumar Barua returned to Calcutta to join the M.A. Course in Ancient Indian History and Culture. He also took up law studies in the University Law College. His early antiquarian interest and the later systematic study of the Buddhist and other classical texts invariably led him

to research in the field of ancient Indian history and culture. Indeed he worked as a research scholar at the Calcutta University under D. R. Bhandarkar, Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture for a considerable period (1935-39). It was during this period that he came in touch with some of the external minds of contemporary Bengal and Assam : Dr. Hem Chandra Roychoudhury, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Dr. Stella Kramrisch, Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Tarun Ram Phukan and Nabin Ch. Bordoloi. Immersed as he was in his academic pursuits Birinchi Kumar Barua yet found time to devote himself to the furtherance of the cause of Assamese literature. He organised, when he was still at the Presidency college, the Bezbaroa Samiti— for a systematic reading and appraisal of the work of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. He was also beginning to make his own contribution in the creative field. Dr. Rohini Kumar Barua, his friend and contemporary at the Presidency College recalls those days :

'Dr. Dinanath Sarma's *Awahan* made its appearance when we were boarders of the Hindu hostel. Barua sustained this journal with short stories under the pen-name 'Bina Barua', that are now classics in Assamese literature. Barua had the knack of infecting others with literary zeal. Many amongst his friends had tried their hands at literary ventures, but while that urge in them later died out, Barua bore the torch steadfastly long thereafter and could blaze a trail of glory.'

The late-lamented poet Jatindranath Dowerah was in Calcutta at that time. Dowerah was extremely shy, and would not publish his poems. It was mainly through the efforts of Birinchi Kumar Barua, that a great number of Dowerah's writings could see the light of the day. Dowerah's *Katha-Kavita* was coaxed out of oblivion by Barua's diligence.'

(Dr. B.K.—“My Reminiscences and a tribute : Robini Kanta Barua” in Prof. B. K. Barua Commemoration Volume p.xxi)

His short stories made a distinct contribution to the evolution of the short story in Assamese. Combining a natural impulse for realism with a flair for wit and sophistication, he as a writer of stories did break a new ground. To that period belongs also *Akan* (*Tiny Tot*), a children’s magazine, which was edited by Birinchi Barua for three years.

After obtaining his degree in law, Dr. Barua worked for sometimes in the department of Modern Indian Language of the Calcutta University. In 1938 he came over to Cotton College and joined the department of Assamese as a lecturer. His intimate involvement in the teaching of Assamese, his deep scholarship and insight into the cultural history of Assam soon transformed the character of the teaching of Assamese language and literature and gave it a new orientation.

Perhaps his research work under Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar also had taught him one important thing : it is the living interest in ancient history and culture. It helped develop a broad view of literature and language in relation to society. He learnt to analyse the classical literary texts not only for their intrinsic literary value but also for composing a comprehensive picture of the life of the Assamese people. His *Assamese Literature* (published by P.E.N.) was written in 1940 and his novel *Jivanar Batat* was written before his journey to Europe.

In 1945, Birinchi Kumar Barua left for London to work for his Ph.D. degree at the University of London under Professor K. de. B. Codrington of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He was awarded the Ph.D. degree of London University in 1947. The subject of his thesis which was later published as *A Cultural History of Assam* was the cultural history of Assam from the early period to the coming of the Ahoms in the 13th century.

On his way back from England, Bitinchi Kumar Barua visited Europe, including Switzerland and Finland, and the experience gave him valuable insight into European folklore in which too he became deeply interested. An important contribution has been his *Switzerland Bhraman* (Travels to Switzerland) a book which recounts his visit memorably.

After his return from England, Bitinchi Kumar Barua rejoined Cotton College but after the founding of Gauhati University on the 1st January 1948, he joined the post-graduate department of Assamese as a Reader. Gauhati University now made an auspicious beginning with Prof. K. K. Handique, one of the most distinguished scholars and orientalists as Vice-Chancellor and Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati, one of the foremost scholars and perhaps the most respected interpreter of Assamese language and culture as the Head of the Assamese Department. It is in this distinguished company that Barua began to chalk out the course of academic direction of the new University and make in due course his own invaluable contribution towards its progress. It was in a way the fulfilment of a long cherished dream as Bitinchi Kumar Barua, even in his Calcutta days, was deeply connected with the move to have Assam's own University for the all-round betterment of Assamese literature and culture. In December 1944 when a University Convention was held to articulate this aspiration, Bitinchi Kumar Barua took an active part in it and was instrumental in persuading Gopinath Bordoloi, then undisputed leader of the Province to spearhead the movement for the university and launch a collection-drive throughout the state. He was the driving force behind the efforts of the Trust Board, which was formed for this purpose.

Once Barua joined the University his tremendous capacity to undertake academic pursuits and his dedication to the welfare of the University which he helped to set up singled him out for a more onerous assignment and he was appointed Secretary of University Classes on February 1950. This came

to him in addition to his teaching responsibilities. On Barua now fell the mantle of leadership : to organise not only the Assamese department and the Arts faculty in general but also to give shape to the whole gamut of academic activities of the Gauhati University. The administrative responsibilities demanded full-time attention and a high degree of competence. It is amazing how Barua could combine his primary work of teaching and academic undertaking like planning courses or guiding research with the administrative task of building up of a modern University from a scratch. His contribution could be seen right from the coming up of a campus where there were only open paddy fields not a long time ago to the building up of a well-stocked library of the University. Assamese department, which bore the impress of the scholarship of Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati and Birinchi Kumar Barua in ample measure was given a very broad base because of the fact that Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, English and other literatures were included in the course of Assamese studies. Social and cultural history of Assam found a prominent place in this course. Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati's untimely demise saw Birinchi Kumar Barua carry on from where Dr. Kakati left off in the field of research and it was Birinchi Kumar Barua's constant guidance and the thrust of his unflagging zeal that resulted in excellent contributions in the field of Assamese Studies by younger scholars like Dr. Maheswar Neog, Dr. Satyendranath Sarma and Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami. It was a significant achievement of Barua that a Publication Division of the University was also established and energised and apart from important research papers, the University published an Encyclopaedia for children in Assamese and an Assamese translation of the original Mahabharata, the first two Volumes of which were edited by him.

However, it was an unfortunate event that the University was rent by divisive forces championing matters of largely non-academic origin in the early sixties and some of the leaders sought to play down the important and valuable role of Birinchi Kumar Barua in the University. A vocal minority

was up against Birinchi Kumar Barua continuing as the Secretary of University classes and in August 1962 Barua relinquished his charge as Secretary, University classes. However, as an academic administrator Barua had important achievements. Next to the building up of the Department of Assamese language and literature in Gauhati University, was the thrust Barua had given to folklore studies on modern lines in Assam for developing a comprehensive approach and methodology for studies of folk culture. Barua could not go into some of areas of concern in the field of folklore more extensively and he could not do that perhaps because of his several preoccupations in the Gauhati University. An ideal opportunity presented itself when Barua was invited as a visiting Professor by the folklore Institute, Indiana University for the Winter Semester of 1963. During this semester, Barua gave lectures to students from China, Japan, Formosa, Thailand, Africa, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Israel, U.A.R. and from the United States on the subject of Indian folklore. He travelled widely. He established contacts and exchanged ideas with folklore scholars from different parts of the World. Under spells of hard work and intense application for absorbing as much as he possibly could from the atmosphere of the University in the United States which he found very invigorating, his health, already fragile, suffered a set-back. Yet he was not to be defeated by mere fatigue or bouts of illness. Barua spoke and wrote indefatigably. His zest and commitment were evident in his writings sent home from the United States clarifying or elaborating on many a topic in response to the requests of his students or others back home. These writings, compiled in his *Professor Baruar Chithi* is perhaps the best and most memorable recount in Assamese of an experience of teaching and living in the environs of an American University.

Barua came back to Assam from the States on August 24, 1963 and almost immediately set about his work on an anthology of Indian Folklore and an encyclopaedia of Indian Folklore in two volumes but these works did not go beyond the preliminary stage. The frenetic pace of work which he

set for himself appeared to affect him now and his health was causing a great deal of concern. Barua participated in the xxvith International Congress of Orientalists in New Delhi in January 1964 and discussed his projected anthology and compendium of folklore with Prof. W. Norman Brown of Pennsylvania University there. He took the initiative to invite the 22nd All India Oriental Conference to Gauhati and later he became the Convenor of its Publication Committee of the same. Meanwhile Barua fell ill but he attended the meeting of the Publication Committee held at his residence on March 21, 1964. But that night itself he was taken seriously ill. He never recovered from this illness and passed away at 8-30 A.M. on March 30, 1964.

If both the creative and scholastic works of Birinchi Kumar Barua are considered together, we get the image of a very remarkable academician. His *Asamiya Bhasa* and *Asamia Bhasa Aru Samskriti* as well as *Assamese Literature (PEN)*, *Early Assamese Literature* and *Modern Assamese Literature* are helpful books on the subjects. *History Of Assamese Literature* published by the Sahitya Akademi is another such work. His *Sankaradeva, Vaisnava Saint of Assam* in English is a significant work which gives an interpretation of the genius of Sankaradeva to the outside World. Besides he was the editor of good number of Assamese classics including the *Ankiya Nats of Sankaradeva*. He was also the co-editor of an anthology of Assamese poetry. Other books like *Asamar lokasamskriti* in Assamese, a study of Assamese folklore, *The Cultural History of Assam* and *The Early Geography of Assam* in English are pioneering contributions in the respective fields of study. If one adds to this his considerable creative output—the two major novels, two volumes of Short Stories and an One-Act play, his work in its totality appears to be quite remarkable.

Birinchi Kumar Barua was closely connected with a large number of institutions in the Country and served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Central Sahitya Akademi for many years. He was appointed a member of the official

Language Commission which submitted its findings to Govt. of India in August 1956. In Assam he guided the affairs of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies for quite sometime and also founded the Assam Academy for Cultural Relations, which in a way embodied his integrated cultural perspective for Assam.

Prof. Humayun Kabir who knew Birinchi Kumar Barua closely described him as one of the leading humanists and scholars of contemporary India. This is an apt description justified by the wide range of the humanistic disciplines which Barua's scholarship embraced. About his last successful assignment at the United States where he spent a Winter Semester at the Indian University, Prof. Richard M. Dorson, Professor of History and Folklore had this to say :

"I attended all his lectures, and discussed with him projects of mutual and absorbing interest. He participated in our preliminary discussions of the Society for Asian folklore, and served as a member of the Executive Board when it was organised.

To us professor Barua appeared imposing, handsome, sturdy and in continual good spirits. He organised his lectures, the first on this subject in the United States, with logic and clarity, and delivered them with feeling."

(*Birinchi Kumar Barua* by Richard M. Dorson; in *Prof. B.K. Barua Commemoration Volume*; p-xvii)

While paying his tribute, Prof. A. L. Basham, his friend and contemporary at the London University, rightly mentioned that the void left by the passing away of Birinchi Kumar Barua would be felt not only in Assam but throughout India and wherever things Indian are studied. Academic scholars, researchers in the fields of ancient history, culture and folklore in Assam continue to miss his guiding hand, and above all, his warm human personality.

## Historian and Critic

Birinchi Kumar Barua is acknowledged as one of the learned interpreters of the cultural heritage of Assam. In some ways Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati inspired Birinchi Kumar Barua. Dr. Kakati was the foremost literary critic of his generation and his *Assamese* book : *Its Formation And Development* was also a most distinctive work of scholarship. Dr. Kakati was also an authority on the literature of Neo-vaisnavism in Assam. Dr. Kakati investigated into the deeper roots of Assam's social history and culture with scholarly exactness and objectivity. Barua's interests covered a wide field and his scholarship was extensive rather than intensive. His main contributions covered three areas : interpretation of the earliest period, history of language and literature of Assam and lastly, compilation and interpretation of the folklore of Assam. Because of this many-sidedness of his interests, Barua's books, both in Assamese and English, provide the wide introduction to Assamese culture and the Assamese people right from antiquity up to the modern times.

Assam saw a literary Renaissance at the end of the 19th Century. The deep interest of scholars like Dr. Kakati and Barua in the origins of Assamese culture and cultural history can be traced to this historical development.

The reinstatement of the Assamese language in the schools of Assam in 1873, the impact of the 19th-Century Renaissance in Bengal and a rediscovery of the native creative tradition and the resources of the language were the harbinger of a new age in Assamese literature. The writings of Laksminath

Bezbaroa (1864-1938), Chandra Kumar Agarwalla (1867-1938) and Hem Chandra Goswami (1872-1928) made one aware of the new found identity and direction for modern Assamese language and literature. Laksminath Bezbaroa not only provided the outline of neo-vaisnavism in Assamese in terms of its known history but also interpreted the work of the great saint poets as part of Assamese literary tradition. The work of Hem Chandra Goswami in compiling the precious ancient manuscripts of Assam and the contribution of Dr. Kakati in making a critical presentation of neo-vaisnavite literature in Assamese were, in a way, part of the same effort to discover the rich culture and literary heritage of Assam.

When Birinchi Kumar Barua undertook the writing of *A Cultural History of Assam* (1951) he was no doubt inspired by this spirit of enquiry into Assam's linguistic and cultural heritage. His work of research under Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar (1932-37) and in the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London (1945-47) also gave him the right kind of training to take up this pioneering work. He was, however, conscious of his limitations :

"No one other than myself however is more conscious of the limitations to labour under in writing a Cultural History of Assam at this stage of historical research in the province. Systematic investigations have not yet been carried out into various aspects of early Assamese life. In preparing this volume, I myself had to hunt out most of the information incorporated in it".

(Preface, *A Cultural History of Assam*, p. vii)

Barua also acknowledged that *Early History of Kamrupa* by K. L. Barua and *Kamrupa Sasanavali* by Padmanath Bhattacharyya helped him greatly although these books dealt mostly with political and dynastic history. A cultural history of Assam is not only an analysis of the inscriptions, contemporary

literature and travellers' accounts bearing on the early period, it is also a reinterpretation of the materials of these earlier books in a new historical perspective. There was a conscious effort on the part of the writer to relate his insights to the broader cultural and national life as a whole.

One of the conclusions reinforced by Barua's book is that the first Aryan migration to this region took place in the early centuries of the Christian era. Barua made this inference on the basis of various sources including the Nidhanpur Copper Plate (6th Century). The process of Aryанизation which began in this early periods is also to be seen in the influences of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata on the local lore, and in the folk festivals. This was also traced by the writer in the growth of modern Assamese language, which developed as early as in the 10th Century. Another point made in the book is that the Aryan speakers migrated to Assam mostly from *Madhyadesa* or Mid-India. Another special feature bearing on this historical aspect is mentioned thus :

"Anthropometric researches have not been carried out in Assam. So nothing can be said about the ethnic affinity of these Aryan speakers. It is nevertheless certain that before their arrival in the Valley of the Brahmaputra these speakers lost purity of Nordic blood and became almost a mixed race." (*Introduction : A Cultural History of Assam*, p.9)

*A Cultural History of Assam* presents the comprehensive background of politics, social system, religion and the fine arts from the early years of the Christian era to the 12th or 13th Century. While all through there had been evidence of a continuous spread of Pan-Indian culture and civilisation, there are also obvious gaps due to the absence of systematic explorations in this region. The finer specimens of architecture and sculpture show their affinities with the Pataliputra or the Gupta Schools, a strong current of influence flowing from

North Bihar and Mid-India being an important aspect of early Assamese art. One of the important features of this early history is the mutation that the Indian caste system underwent in Assam.

The book contains a chapter on 'religion' which gives an outline view of Saivism, Saktism, Vaisnavism and Buddhism as well as other religious sects in ancient Assam. While Saivism was indicated by the inscriptions found in many copper-plates of the period, epigraphic and textual evidence showed that Vaisnavism was prevalent in Assam in the early times. Saktism which indicated a distinct change coming over in the medieval period represented some features which were esoteric. According to Birinchi Kumar Barua, religion was only one aspect of the gradually changing cultural pattern in Assam. He writes:

"From the twelfth-century, however there seems to appear marked provincial characteristics in Assamese art. During this period, Tantric rituals began to dominate the Brahmanic religion and the Mongoloid infiltration influenced the culture of the population". (*A Cultural History of Assam*: p.196)

In the book Dr. Barua has also mentioned that Assam's ancient culture also showed a fusion of Aryan strands with the Kirata or the Mongoloid elements, that is, the beliefs, cults and myths of the primitive races and tribes of Assam. Quoting Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Barua writes :

"Dr. Chatterjee further holds that there was a likelihood of the Aryan-speaking followers of the Vedic religion and the Mongoloids with their primitive religion influencing each other in certain aspects of their religious and social life." (*A Cultural History of Assam* : p.199)

Barua has mentioned that the Ramayana was translated into Assamese as early as in the 14th century. Sanskrit was the court language in Assam and all important documents

were written in that language. Assamese originated from Indo-Aryan language of great antiquity. Hiwen Tsiang, the famous Chinese traveller, recorded in his account in the 7th century that the language of Assam differed only a little from the language of Mid-India.

Regarding the early Aryanization of the Brahmaputra Valley Barua wrote also in *Temples and Legends of Assam* (co-authored with H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy) :

"The Aryan influence became so widespread and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals became deep-rooted in the life of the common people."

(p. 7)

In this context he has also shown that even the Assamese woman's undergarment called *mekhela* speaks of that ancient Aryan legacy.

A great deal of research has gone into the study of the origin and growth of Assamese language and though the work of Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati is the most outstanding in point of depth and originality of insight, Kaliram Medhi, Dimbeswar Neog (1900-1968) and Birinchi Kumar Barua have also made contributions in this field. Barua's '*Assamiya Bhasa*' (1949) and '*Assamiya Bhasa Aru Samskriti*' (1957) followed Dr. Kakati closely in the study of Assamese language and culture. It was Barua's contention that though Assamese was a descendant of Magadhi, a branch of the Indo-Aryan language and it had also assimilated some of words and phrases from Bodo and other non-Aryan languages. On the other hand old Assamese had more affinity with Maithili and Oriya than Bengali.

Barua also evaluated the development of modern Assamese language. The missionaries of Baptist Mission brought out in 1846, the *Arunodoy* (Sunrise), the first periodical in the Assamese language which set a new pattern of writing in Assamese, using the words and idioms of daily use. Barua's

well-edited selections from this work of the missionaries in the book *Arunodayar Dhalphat* (1965) throws a good deal of light on this development.

In the *A Cultural History of Assam* one finds many references to popular customs and beliefs. The Vedic custom of the worship of *Indra* is connected with the popular festival of Bhateli in Assam. Barua's interest in Assamese folk-culture grew out this absorption and search for meaning in the popular belief, customs and festivals of the people. His *Asamar Loka-Samskriti*, perhaps was published in 1961 and it is also an attempt to present a comprehensive picture of Assamese life. The eighteen chapters of the book analyse folk culture of Assam, each chapter being devoted to a particular aspect of it. The first chapter provides a general account of the beliefs connected with animals and birds, trees, agricultural activities, birth and marriage and the festivals of the communities. The second chapter deals with the geographical factors that have influenced the choice of river banks for habitation, building of houses, use of fish as food and the position of the snake goddess as an object of worship. The third chapter discusses different types of folk-literature : lullaby, marriage songs, riddle and the folk tales. Several chapters are devoted to folk beliefs concerning the snake, fish, fowl, areca nut etc. The book also takes one its one direction to the tribal background of North East India as a whole.

"There is a general belief among the Assamese as well as the tribals that snakes reside in water, rice granaries and places containing wealth. In the olden days when people dug tanks they used to plant a post in the middle of a tank and carve a snake on it." (Prafulla Dutta Goswami : "Dr. Barua as a Student of Folk culture" Prof. B. K. Barua Commemoration Volume p.xii

Barua has pointed out how the snake in folk literature has been connected with one of the memorable folk tales

in Assamese known as the story of Beula and Lakhinder. He has discussed also some tribal myths in order to show the importance of fish in the beliefs of the Mongoloid tribes of North Eastern India. Similarly the egg is regarded as a fertility symbol both in the Hindu Assamese as well as in the tribal societies. An egg is planted under the place where the bride and the groom are ceremonially bathed as part of the Hindu marriage ritual. Some of the tribes in Assam offer eggs before they set about their plantation.

One of the interesting and more detailed chapters is on the types of houses that are to be found in traditional Assamese Society. The Namghar or the public prayer hall comprise several houses : a covered gate, the *Chong Ghar* or Store for keeping materials for dramatic performances, the open prayer hall, and the *Manikut* or house at its eastern end to keep the idol of *Krishna* and religious manuscripts and books. The *Manikut* sometimes preserves relics of earlier saints.

There are chapters devoted to the festivities and the community dances connected with these in the village. Similarly, there are independent chapters on the musical instruments and the traditional crafts of Assam. At the end of the book there are more than a hundred sketches and photographs illustrating pottery items, bamboo and wood work, traditional designs on cloth woven by the Assamese womenfolk, Assamese ornaments, house construction, musical instruments, scenes of villages or of wild life.

Birinchi Kumar Barua's handling of the whole complex subject of Assamese culture, including as it did, early history and historiography, language and literature and folklore opened up a new horizon in studies of the cultural heritage of the region. An invariable result of this kind of approach is that the analysis remains at times general for want of a clearly specific point of reference. But his was a pioneering effort

and, hopefully, it should bear fruit in the systematic studies and research work of the future generations of students of the cultural heritage of the Country.

Literary criticism and the writing of history of literature developed in Assamese in the modern period. Laksminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938) who spearheaded the Assamese literary Renaissance at the end of the 19th Century was a pioneer in this field. Dimbeswar Neog (1900-1968) in his *Assamiya Sabityar Buranji* (1957) and the *New Light on Assamese Literature* (1962) in English made a thorough presentation of the history of Assamese literature. Dr. Banikanta Kakati's, *Purani Assamiya Sabitya* (1940), a collection of his articles on old Assamese literature has attained the stature of a classic. His *Sabitya Aru Prem* (1950) shows a deep understanding of some areas of European literature. His criticism of the Assamese romantic poets is also both deeply sensitive and evaluative.

In the matter of research into the early historical background of Assamese language and literature and editing of the classical texts of the literature of neo-vaisnavism Dr. Banikanta Kakati was a guiding spirit behind Birinchi Kumar Barua. His critical edition of the *Ankiya Nat*, that is, 15 plays of Sankardeva, Madhavadeva and Gopaldeva and several other poetic texts of early Assamese literature may be mentioned in this context.

Birinchi Kumar Barua evinced his interest in literary criticism quite early. He was a co-editor of an anthology of modern Assamese poetry *Kavita Kunja*. His work of literary criticism *Kavya Aru Abhivyanjana* (1941), discusses the principles of literary criticism and some of the basic ideas of Beneditto Croce. It brought a note of literary theory into Assamese criticism. His *Assamiya Katha Sabitya* (1950) is about old Assamese prose literature. Barua also wrote a number of books in English on the history of Assamese literature. His *Assamese Literature* (P. E. N. Bombay 1941), *Modern Assamese Literature* (with an introduction by Prof. Humayun Kabir 1957) and the

*History of Assamese Literature*, ( Sahitya Akademi, 1964) have been well known to many outsiders. Here Barua's work has been of a pioneering nature. His *Sankardeva vaishnava Saint of Assam* (1960) not only helped in making Assamese Neo-Vaishnavism being widely known but also in arousing a critical interest in its literature amongst scholars in India. In this context one can also refer to two of his critical articles, one on the poetical work of Sankardeva, the other on early Assamese prose in the important volume *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature* published by the Gauhati University (1953).

Barua did not write at any length on the literature of his times and it would seem that his critical tenets for judging poetry were not different from those of the earlier generation, which saw the flowering of romanticism in Assamese poetry. He had considerable empathy for Laksminath Bezbaroa and others of this period in Assamese literature and he wrote very understandingly on Jatindranath Dowerah (1892-1964) and Parvati Prasad Barua (1904-1964) who were basically lyrical poets, each carrying forward in his own way the romantic spirit in a muted or sometimes tragic undertone.

Birinchi Kumar Barua wrote on a wide range of subjects including folklore and cultural history, two areas of special interest to which he devoted considerable time. He did not have enough of time perhaps to undertake pure literary criticism in later years. In fact, compared to a scholar critic like Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati, he wrote very little criticism that could be called evaluative in the real sense. His chief contribution was the development of the historical approach, which highlights periods and influences rather than formulate judgements on particular writings. It is significant that substantial benefits have come from this approach in the growth of historical and academic criticism in Assamese.



## Novelist and Short Story Writer

Birinchi Kumar Barua achieved great distinction also as a novelist and short story writer in Assamese. He wrote short stories when he was studying in Calcutta, specialising on Ancient Indian history and literature and these short stories published in *Awahan*, a famous Assamese journal did break a new ground. When his major novel *Jivanar Batai* (*On the Highway of Life*) was published in 1944, Birinchi Kumar Barua had achieved something which no other Assamese novelist had achieved so far.

Dr. Banikanta Kakati, the doyen of the literary critics in Assam immediately recognised the merit of the novel as a major achievement in modern Assamese literature. Dr. Kakati praised "the writer's wide and intimate acquaintance with all phases and features of Assamese social life in their light and shade, giving it the stature of a classic." Later critics like Dr. Hiren Gohain and Prof. Bhaben Barua, analysing the theme and content of the novel from varying angles in the sixties have found *Jivanar Batai* to be the most significant Assamese novel—which is also one of the best Indian novels. While Dr. Kakati's comments (published in 1945) contained the first serious recognition of the value of the novel and touched on a particular dimension of the novel—its reflection of the Assamese social life, they did not go beyond half a page. Likewise, Hiren Gohain's comments on the novel published in 1964 and contained in *Sahityar Satya* (11, 139-141) were not more than two pages though they were historically important for its approach to the 'theme' of the novel. Bhaben Barua's

article on the *Jivanar Batat* was also published in 1964 in Assamese and it, along with its longer English version published in 1966, was the first exhaustive and multi-dimensional critical essay on the novel. This article also treated in a developed form the dimension which Dr. Kakati first mentioned and was given an importance by Bhaben Barua through the subtitle of the English essay, "*Jivanar Batat : The Story of a Society*". On the other hand, Bhaben Barua's article brought to light for the first time the significance of the two realities—the 'outer' social reality and the 'inner' psychological-spiritual one.

The most impressive quality of *Jivanar Batat* is related to the fact that here the outer reality of social circumstances is as alive as the inner reality on the human mind. Significantly the main character in the novel is Tagar, a woman of purer intent and deeper sensitivity than any other person in the story. Her sensitive nature with an unusual depth of character is also the result of the influence of the traditional religion of Vaisnavism in a rural Assamese family in a village in Upper Assam. Tagar's misfortunes are far too many but it is the sense of resignation or a religious perception of that kind which reduces the reader's awareness of intensity of the tragic outcome at the end.

One can regard the character of Tagar as the central focus in the novel. It is this focus which brings out the theme or the moral vision or the pattern in the novel.

Commenting on this vision of the writer which, so to say, imposes a pattern in the novel, Prof. Bhaben Barua wrote in his illuminating essay '*Jivanar Batat : The Story of a Society*',

"The first part of the novel, moreover, establishes the context of a social process; and the values the novel reveals and by which human conduct has been judged are the crystallisation of a spirit of human understanding that had percolated into the society through the ages

and was quickened by the spread of the Vaisnava religion. These values have nothing of the doctrinaire about them; they pivot round the simple truth of the sanctity of the heart.'

("*Jivanar Batat* : The Story of A Society": by Bhaben Barua)

The inner meaning of the opening lines of the folk poem preceding the narrative is a girl's plea to her dear father not to send her in marriage away from home against her wish. The reader cannot miss that it is something that literally happens in Tagar's case, marking the beginning of the end of her freedom and happiness in life.

The following is, in brief, the outline of the story of the novel.

"Kamalakanta, a young man in college, comes to Marangi to attend the marriage of the younger sister of Krishnadatta, his classmate and friend. Krishnadatta's father is the Mauzadar of Marangi (Mauzadar is an important functionary in charge of collecting land-revenue in his area) and as such the marriage is a social event in the village. Bapuram Bora is the Mauzadar's neighbour and the two families are in close friendly terms. Kamalakanta meets Tagar, the young unmarried daughter of Bapuram Bora in the house of the Mauzadar and develops an instant liking for her. One day, when the two are alone for a while, Kamalakanta puts a ring on Tagar's finger, thereby demonstrating his love for her and his resolve to marry her. Tagar instantly reacts with the words, 'Why have you brought ruin on me'— words which do have a meaningful resonance later in the story. Kamalakanta reassures Tagar that it is not an impulsive act and he means to fulfil his pledge when the time comes. Tagar's sense of self-respect makes a deep impression on Kamalakanta.

"After some time, the marriage proposal is ratified by the consent of the two families of Tagar and Kamalakanta.

"Kamalakanta passes his B.A. examination securing first class, which now make him eligible for appointment in the provincial civil service. The prospects of this appointment ignites ambition in Kamalakanta and his father, an office clerk who wants to improve his social standing, Kamalakanta appears in the civil service examination and is duly selected as his selection is backed by the influential Manik Hazarika, a rich planter. Kamalakanta now accepts the hands of Suprabha, a sophisticated girl, the daughter of Manik Hazarika in marriage. Hereafter, Kamalakanta disappears from the scene of action in the story only to reappear in the final part of the novel.

"Meanwhile Tagar in her home is taking lessons in weaving designs from Dharani, a weaving instructor now working at Marangi. In this connection Dharani visits the house of Bapuram Bora quite frequently. One fateful day, Bapuram Bora receives a letter from Kamalakanta's father withdrawing the earlier proposal of the marriage of his son with Tagar. It is a stunning blow. Bapuram Bora rushes to the house of the Mauzadar only to be snubbed by the malicious tongue of the Mauzadar's wife hinting at a developing relationship between Dharani and Tagar being talked about by the neighbours, and advising Bapuram Bora to settle his daughter's marriage with Dharani without delay. In his strange state of mind, Bapuram Bora starts imagining things and he reaches home in that fervid state of mind, he sees Dharani's head reclining and touching Tagar while trying to show a new design on the loom. His suspicions confirmed, Bapuram Bora rebukes both in a cruel manner and asks Dharani to marry Tagar to compensate for the ruin he has brought on the family. Tagar, who has no

knowledge of the letter from Kamalakanta's father, is dumb-founded. At the end of this part of the narrative, Tagar is married to Dharani and she leaves her parental home, disowned by her father who also leaves his house on a pilgrimage with a resolve not to return again.

"Tagar, devoted as wife and daughter, is rudely treated by Ahini, her mother-in-law whose words often open up a raw wound from the past. But Tagar is self-effacing, quiet and ever dutiful. Ahini's behaviour changes once a daughter is born to Tagar : She becomes definitely more considerate now. When Ahini dies, Tagar takes over the mantle of the household of Dharani. Meanwhile, Dharani, always a bit indifferent to household affairs devotes more of his time to giving weaving lessons and to social work. He joins the freedom movement, then spreading across the countryside. Roha, Dharani's village, becomes a main centre of the freedom movement. When Dharani is away, Tagar is humiliated by the police. But Dharani becomes a popular figure and very soon Dharani finds himself in jail serving a long sentence for participating in the freedom struggle. During this entire period of Dharani's incarceration, Tagar is left to fend for herself with her little daughter Kamali as her sole support. With this reality of storm and stress, Tagar's mind would often go through an inner struggle.

"At times, Tagar would remember her father's cruel treatment to her; and all alone, she would shed tears. Knowing fully well her character and ideals, her father had disbelieved her most cruelly. He had fixed up marriage overnight ignoring Tagar's inner sufferings and without making proper enquiry to get at the truth, only because he had wanted to retain his prestige in the society. For the sake of his good name and frightened of nasty rumours he had sacrificed his paternal love

for his child. With a sense of pride and pain Tagar would try to delete from her mind her father's image.

"Tagar tried her utmost to forget the past. But the thing one tries to forget comes out in all the dreams and walkings. Borne on the waves of memory, the trifles incidents of the past would take on an extra-ordinary colour; and the common episodes of the past would turn uncommon. However hard she had been trying to run away from the golden moment of her life, it appeared to her eyes more grand and alluring like the top of a temple seen from a distance.

"Dharani's health broke down during his stay in jail and when released, his illness appeared to be terminal. Through the devoted nursing of Tagar who at time would cling to her husband passionately and the treatment given by Dr. Golap Hazarika, a friend of the family, Dharani recovered temporarily but only partially but died soon after. A helpless widow, Tagar has no time even to grieve for her husband for she had to earn a livelihood. She joined a weavers' guild formed for the benefit of the poor widows. Dr. Hazarika is the President of the Sangha, and having known the misfortunes of the family, he is quite sympathetic. But Tagar has again to face the trail of gossip as Doctor Hazarika is a widower. It provides an opportunity to the Police Sub-Inspector to settle his scores with Dharani's wife and the independent-minded Doctor.

"Meanwhile, Kamalakanta is posted to Roha as the Sub-Deputy Collector. His wife, interested in weaving takes the help of Tagar to learn some design and Tagar visits the official residence of Kamalakanta more than once in this connection. However, neither Kamalakanta nor Tagar is aware of each other so far. It so happens that a ring is stolen from Kamalakanta's house and police

investigates into the matter. The needle of suspicion turns to Tagar only because the Sub-Inspector has information that she is the likely culprit. Police raids the house of Tagar and recovers as stolen property of Kamalakanta a ring with Kamalakanta's initials on it and kept inside a small box which bears the name of Dr. Golap Hazarika. This small box is the one given as a gift by the genial Doctor to Kamali, Tagar's daughter with whom he is friendly. The Police Sub-Inspector finds this only to be conclusive evidence of the suspected relationship between Tagar and the Doctor. The Police Sub-Inspector now confronts the Sub-Deputy Collector with the stolen ring, now recovered with his findings but it does not take Kamalakanta much time to find out that the ring with the very old design is actually the one he put on Tagar's finger in his youth many years ago. The tables are finally turned on him as he looks at the ring, at first complacently and then in a state of shock. He sees the innocence of Tagar, his own past and himself mirrored in it.

"Kamalakanta saw everything around him becoming all hazy. This ring of his golden youth that once bore his good wishes had now come back to him in the form of a curse and soiled with many sorrows and oppressions and humiliations of life. The box and the ring swiftly slipped down from his hand. His head caught a sensation of reeling round and round along with the ring rolling down on the ground. Like an epileptic patient all shaky, he clutched at the chair close at hand and sat down on it. His face became white-pale like a dead body placed on the dissection table. A horde of memories started a dance macabre in his mind, already numbed into passivity."

And here ends the story.

Readers not fully attuned to the development of the theme on the deeper plane may find in the denouement a kind of device adopted by the writer. But this is not the case if one can see the inner struggle in Tagar's mind in the proper light—her mind reverts back to that single incident again and again—and grasps its thematic significance. One has also to give closer attention to the language – particularly to the images and symbols in the language of the novel which lend a kind of sharpness and precision to the inner drama.

The novel has an organic depth : a pattern of experience in which the characters and events fall in place. The men and women are highly individualised but at the same time representative of a traditional and vibrant Assamese society. There are deft touches of realism which make them plausible. The scene of Ahini's death, the death of the elephant Mahut when he gives up taking opium, the description of the dream sequence in Tagar's mind are realistic on the psychological plane. In the evocation of the landscape and the countryside, the writer's imagination gently moves over the whole panorama of Assamese life and society taking in or visualizing details including the immemorial ties that bind an old traditional community. It is because of the combination of these qualities that Birinchi Kumar Barua's *Jivanar Batat* is perhaps the only novel in Assamese literature, which has been acknowledged to be a classic by the good critic or the serious literary historian.

Birinchi Kumar Barua's second novel which he published in 1957 came more than a decade after his first novel *Senji Patar Kabini* (A Tale of the Green Leaves) is quite readable with an engaging story but the writer's creative imagination does not seem to be very active here as in his earlier novel. The main story being placed within the tea garden community confined within the tea garden, the novelist is somewhat hardput to relate it to the mainstream and bind the events

through the narrative thread of a major idea or a vision. Nareswar, the main character from the mainstream of the traditional Assamese society is not in a position to be integrated into the story. There is a developing relationship between Nareswar and Sonia, the vibrant girl of mixed parentage, her father being an European planter and the mother a tea garden woman, but all this does not at all click though Sonia remains a very engrossing character. There is no stable order of values to sustain the theme in the novel and the novelist is not in a position to imagine strongly enough to force new solutions in the situation explored in the novel. But one important aspect of the novel's readability is that the unconventional characters like Sonia or Mrs. Miller are quite living and the writer is able to convey the atmosphere of inhibited vitality and physical vigour seen in the tea garden people.

Birinchi Kumar Barua's contribution to creative literature besides the two novels should include a considerable number of short stories he wrote at the very start of his literary career. *Pat Parivartan* (1948) and *Aghon Bai* (1950) are the two collection of stories, which were, in fact written and published much earlier. In the thirties, Birinchi Kumar Barua was not only one of the most important writers of short stories in Assamese, his short stories struck a distinctly modern note. The short story *Aghon Bai* is a rich human story of a hapless woman in a village and has all the ingredients of a novel. Indeed these short stories remarkable for their characterisation, colloquial verve and the eye for detail in describing the social scene or the background.

Birinchi Kumar Barua's very significant novel on Assamese life and society did bring about a qualitative change in the tradition of the Assamese novel. Till then although the novel has come into its own in Indian literature in the most important languages, in Bengali through the great masters like Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath, in Hindi through none

other than Premchand, Assamese literature in this particular aspect remained in the back waters and no Assamese novelist could come up to the full potential of this modern genre. Rajani Kanta Bordoloi (1897-1939) the most important of the novelists with a good readership wrote a number of historical novels but the overall impression appeared to be one of lack of verisimilitude or the depth of psychological realism. Therefore Birinchi Kumar Barua had none of the advantages of a solid tradition before him but it is his creative response to a human situation and the concrete vision of Assamese life that could lead him to write a novel of far reaching significance in the history of modern Assamese literature.

It is a fact that Laksminath Bezbaroa, who wrote only one novel, did fail as a novelist. But Laksminath was a superb short story writer in his own way. Birinchi Kumar Barua absorbed enough of the narrative skill of Bezbaroa as well as his close observation of the typical features of the Assamese life to perfect his own craft in the same narrative style. Like Bezbaroa again, he made full use of the language or the idiom of the people as no other Assamese novelist had done, before or after him.

Assamese short stories have a chequered tradition. Laksminath Bezbaroa, who started this genre in Assamese a few years after Rabindranath Tagore had established this form in Bengali, published his first collection of short stories named *Surabhi* in 1909, which was quickly followed by two other collections, namely, *Sadhu Kathar Kuki* (1910) and *Jonbiri* (1913). These stories show the influence of the Assamese folk tales as well as the stories of Rabindranath Tagore whom Bezbaroa read avidly. In some of these stories, Bezbaroa's humour or the satirical bent of mind is given free play in presenting the seamy side of Assamese society, but in some other stories, one hears the still sad music of humanity. One finds the spirit

of humanism deeply embedded in the best of these stories, endowing their simplicity with a kind of universality. But the simple narrative technique of Bezbabora could not have taken the short story very far and in the meantime Assamese society itself was changing in every aspect. Moreover, the short story emerged as the dominant literary form in the thirties and came to occupy the same position which the lyric enjoyed till a decade earlier. And the short story itself started changing in form and content.

Birinchi Kumar Barua is no doubt one of the forerunners of the modern movement in the tradition of short story in Assamese. The earlier stories brought together in *Pat Parivartan* (Change of Scene) are about the then emerging urban life in Assam and there is both a sophistication in presentation and a delicate play of wit. About the later stories striking a deeper personal note, a critic has this to say :

These stories indicate the line leading to his masterpiece, *Jivanar Batat*. A large awareness of reality, poignancy that never becomes verbose sentimentality and romantic effusion are some of the basic features of these short stories.

(“A Note on *Senji Patar Kahini* and the Short Stories”  
Bhaben Barua in Prof. B. K. Barua Commemoration  
Volume p.ixvi)

Birinchi Kumar Barua has himself mentioned that his scholarly preoccupations did not allow him to devote more time to his creative writing. His two novels (separated almost by two decades in point of time) and the short stories testify to his great range and versatility sufficient to make one believe that he had in him much more to contribute in the field of creativity and Assamese literature is surely poorer on this account.”

## Assamese Literary Tradition and Birinchi Kumar Barua

The concept of a literary tradition in the case of any literature is generally born out of the historical circumstances of the origin and growth of the language and the literary resources in it which provide a stream of continuity for the future. The three Eastern-most speeches of the great Indo-European family of languages have a common origin and it was due to social and historical reasons, these languages gradually got differentiated from each other and in the process, we have Assamese, Bengali and Oriya as independent languages, each having a literary tradition of its own as distinct as the language itself.

The modern period in Assamese literature started in the last two decades of the 19th Century. A literature almost new in content and form was being created during this period. But this development was also accompanied by a conscious effort to understand and interpret the literary tradition in the Assamese. There was also a historical need to establish the distinctiveness of the Assamese language with a distinct literary heritage. The Assamese writers of the period had to strive to restore that rightful status and position to the Assamese language, which historically belonged to it.

The British rulers of Assam made Bengali instead of Assamese the language of the Courts as well as the medium of instruction in schools, firstly because they had a mistaken notion that Assamese language was a patois of Bengali, secondly, because the adoption of the Bengali language would

be convenient to them as Assam now formed a part of the Bengal Presidency. This historical position has been aptly summed up, thus:

“Since the beginning of the 19th Century it was the East India Company which had a principal partner in the extension of the Bengali language in North-East India. As a result, Bengali got an edge over the languages of Eastern India from 1773 to 1912. Calcutta served as the capital of British India, giving the Bengali people and the Bengali language, a significant centrality, unique in history.” (*Linguistic Situation in North East India*: edited by Mrinal Miri p.12 1982.)

The Assamese writers, many of whom had their education in Calcutta felt the impact of the Bengal Renaissance at first hand and saw its creative fruition in many fields, specially in literature. They were eager to respond creatively in their own spheres but were unable to do so because of the artificial barriers, which stood in the way of development of Assamese language and literature. In this context it was natural for them to expect that Assamese language would get back its lost status and be made the main language in Assam as well as the medium of instruction in the Assamese schools. Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859) the most prominent amongst them was a social reformer and a visionary, who saw the possibilities of a social and literary Renaissance in Assam. In the meantime, the Christian missionaries, specially the Baptist Mission of Sibsagar in Upper Assam Actively promoted the Assamese language, making it the medium in their schools and bringing out in 1846 the *Arunoday* (Sunrise) the first ever monthly magazine in the Assamese language. The first dictionary in the Assamese language was compiled under the aegis of the Mission by Miles Bronson, a missionary. This was followed by the most comprehensive and authoritative dictionary of Hem Chandra Barua (1835-1896) based on a correct system

of Orthography. Very soon, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, Hem Chandra Barua and Gunabhiram Barua (1837-1894) through their writings in the *Arunodoy* laid the foundation of Assamese prose in the modern period.

- Assamese language was officially reinstated in 1873. This historical step had an important bearing on the development of Assamese literature in the subsequent years.

The year 1889 saw the publication of *Jonaki*, a literary journal of such surpassing importance that the entire new period of Assamese literature marking the beginning of the modern period came to be named after it : it was called the *Jonaki* age. It was nothing short of a literary Renaissance, ushered in by the new generation of Assamese writers, spearheaded by Laksminath Bezbaroa (1868-1938), Chandra Kumar Agarwalla (1867-1938) who edited the first issue of the journal and Hem Chandra Goswami (1872-1928). Although *Jonaki* was published continuously only for four years, it brought about a significant change in the creation and appreciation of literature in the Assamese language. It was a change, both in content and form, the most important development being the flowering of Assamese lyrical poetry during this period. Three poets—Laksminath Bezbaroa, Chandra Kumar Agarwalla and Hem Chandra Goswami for the first time shaped and defined the spirit of romanticism in Assamese poetry.

All these poets, it was quite clear, were influenced by their reading and understanding of English romantic poetry. They were also aware of what Tagore was achieving by that time in the field of poetry in the Bengali language. Another remarkable feature in their perspective on literature or literary tradition could be traced to the deep inspiration which they derived from the rich literary heritage of Assam.

All these Assamese writers thought that they were discharging historical responsibility in the new age of Assamese literature. One could see that they redefined the literary ethos for the

Assamese writer in terms of Assam's history, society and culture. One of their major preoccupations was to understand and develop the linguistic and literary tradition of the Assamese people giving it a pride of place in a larger historical perspective of 19th century India.

An appreciation of the depth and significance of Assam's classical heritage, of the literature of Neo-vaisnavism was central to this understanding of this Assamese literary tradition. Another important dimension was provided by the intrinsic resources of the Assamese language including the folklore embedded in the life of the people. Therefore imaginative literature of the *Jonaki* period brought about an entirely new literary and social consciousness in accordance with the spirit of modernity as it appeared then at that particular point of history.

Laksminath Bezbaroa is rightly regarded as the most significant modern Assamese writer—and in many ways a Renaissance personality. Bezbaroa not only had the broad liberality of vision but the creative ability to project the new literary and the social consciousness in his writings. His sense of a literary tradition not only pointed towards the past heritage but aimed at creating what Bezbaroa called as the 'national' literature. The perfect example of this national literature, Bezbaroa found in the literature of Shakespeare – the two outstanding qualities he discovered there were freedom and spontaneity. Bezbaroa thought that without these qualities the full potential or the genius of the Assamese language and its imaginative literature would not be expressed. An earlier model of this kind of excellence in classical Assamese literature, Bezbaroa found in the literature of Neo-vaisnavism although it was entirely religious in content.

Laksminath Bezbaroa's affiliation to the literature of Neo-vaisnavism in Assam was not academic or theoretical. Though his childhood and early upbringing, Bezbaroa was thoroughly

exposed to it, but more than that he fully realised the depth and extent of the cultural resurgence brought about by Neo-vaisnavism in the 15th and the 16th centuries touching every aspect of Assamese society and investing even the common speech or the idiom of the people with rich meaning and significance. It was no accident that Bezbaroa wrote the first systematic account of the lives and teachings of Sankaradeva and of Madhavadeva in modern times. He also wrote on the philosophic content of Assamese Neo-vaisnavism and its difference from the other Schools. Bezbaroa analysed the literary qualities of the poetry of Neo-vaisnavite literature and showed its relevance to the contemporary period in Assamese literature. In this way Bezbaroa also gave a start to literary or textual criticism in Assamese for the first time. This aspect of the evaluation of the Assamese literary tradition and its relevance to the modern period was developed to a greater extent by Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati (1894-1952) who put the excellence of the literature of Neo-vaisnavism in the proper perspective. This created in due course a number of dedicated critics and scholars in Assamese, who made it a point to study the different aspects of the classical heritage of Assamese literature and of Assam's Neo-vaisnavism in particular. One can appropriately recall here a summing up of some of the aspects of the contribution of Sankaradeva by a contemporary scholar critic of Assamese literature:

"He has greatly enriched Assamese literature by translating some *Puranas*, mainly the *Bhagavata Purana* by composing several *Kavyas*, dramas and devotional lyrics, and by compiling doctrinal or theological treatises. He used mainly Assamese as the medium of his literary works, but in dramas and devotional lyrics, the Brajaboli, an artificial literary language, used by the vaisnavas of Eastern India, wherein a sprinkling of Assamese idioms and expressions is also noticed. His proficiency in the

use of Sanskrit is admirably revealed in his devotional compilation *Bhakti Ratnakara* where he adds his own commentary on the verses quoted from different *Puranas*".

("A Contemporary of Guru Nanak—Shankaradeva" by S. N. Sharma in *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Feb. 1978 p.141)

The deep awareness of this heritage was a marked feature of the age of romanticism in Assamese literature.

Bezbaroa and Chandra Kumar adapted the forms of Assamese folk songs and ballads to express personal feelings in their lyrics, which gave new character to Assamese poetry. Their influence continued well upto the thirties of the present century. Rabindranath Tagore introduced the short story in Bengali in 1891: Bezbaroa adapted this form and made it current by the turn of the century.

To quote another critic on Bezbaroa :

"Along with his contemporary Padmanath Gohain Barua, he [Bezbaroa] gave to the Assamese novel in the early nineties its typical romantic character. In drama, through his farce *Litikai* (1889) he started in 1889 a new genre, which he developed further through three more plays, all of them written in 1913; through another play, *Gadadhar Raja*, which is also a farce, he initiated the genre of one-act play; and through three history plays, *Jaymati Kuvari*, *Chakradhvaja Simha* and *Belimar* (all of them written in 1915) he established the chronicle play as a viable genre and patriotism as a major theme. In 1895 through his articles on Assamese literature, Assamese Vaisnavism and Indian spiritualism, he gave logic and abstract ideas a new place and brought a degree of philosophical tone to Assamese literature." ("The Road to Laksminath Bezbaroa" by Bhaben Barua in *Laksminath Bezbaroa, The Sahityarathi of Assam*. p.33 Gauhati University, 1972.)

For about half a century till the thirties Assamese writers

were greatly influenced by Laksminath Bezbaroa although none could match his versatility. The conceptual framework provided by Bezbaroa's idea of the literary tradition and the new role of Assamese language and literature provided the main themes. Bani Kanta Kakati (1894-1952) gave Bezbaroa's views on language a scientific basis in his major work *Assamese : Its Formation and Development* (1941). He also interpreted Laksminath Bezbaroa's insights into Assamese literary heritage in his own criticism, of the classics of Assamese literature.

Unlike Bezbaroa, Bani Kanta Kakati was not a creative writer, but he is widely recognised to be the most important scholar. Kakati's *Assamese : Its Formation and Development* proved the distinctiveness of the language beyond any measure of doubt or controversy. His *Purani Assamiya Sabitya* (1940) with critical discussions of the texts of the Neo-vaisnavite literature, was also a landmark. Bani Kanta Kakati also focussed on the universal and enduring elements of great literature and his *Sabitya Aru Prem* (1950) is an account of some themes of literature. Dimbeswar Neog (1900-1968) another important scholar and critic writing on Assamese language and literature of the romantic period with insight was also influenced by the concepts and ideas that determined the approach of Laksminath Bezbaroa in respect of Assamese literature and society.

Birinchi Kumar Barua who also wrote a critical account of the literature of Neo-vaisnavism and of a few important poets of the romantic period can be placed in the same literary tradition because in his case, there was no departure from the direction indicated by Bezbaroa or Kakati. Birinchi Kumar Barua was akin to Laksminath Bezbaroa in another important aspect : he too was a creative writer, whose living interest in the Assamese society of the present found creative expression in the novel or the stories that he wrote. If his literary criticism often lacked the depth of insight of Bani Kanta Kakati, his

deeper interest lay in cultural history. Birinchi Kumar Barua also wrote on a wide range of subjects including folklore and cultural history and literary criticism.

Literary history is in good part social history. Birinchi Kumar Barua devotes a good deal of attention to the social background. Thus writing on an important work of old Assamese literature, the rendering in verse of the epic Ramayana by Madhava Kandali, an Assamese poet of the 14th century, he has shown how the work retains the literary qualities of the original in good measure and is faithful to Valmiki's Ramayana in every other aspect but also provide glimpses of the Assamese ways of life and Assamese Society of that early period.

His literary criticism on the works of Neo-vaisnavism in Assamese literature of the sixteenth century covered three significant aspects : the form and content of the *Kirtana*, a poetical work of great religious significance composed by Sankaradeva, a work as popular according to him as the *Ram Carit Manas* of Saint poet Tulsidas in Hindi; the literary qualities of the *Bargeets*—devotional song-compositions with a note of sublimity, and the *Ankia* plays or traditional popular dramas which combined folk elements of music, dance and puppetry with a deeply religious content. his *Ankia Nat* containing 15 plays of Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and Gopaldeva (1940) is an important academic and critical work and he has clearly shown how these plays combined basic elements of the form of Sanskrit drama with those of the fold or the indigenous tradition.

Birinchi Kumar Barua gives a very elaborate account of the *Kirtana* and its literary qualities. He has also mentioned how the daily chanting of it became so naturally a part of the life of the Assamese people simply because it was written in a language spoken by them. On the other hand, the *Bargeets* described as the sublime songs by Bani Kanta Kakati were

written in a somewhat elevated or highly literary language, far removed from the speech of the common man but yet the songs were charged with a deep religious and poetic significance.

According to Birinchi Kumar Barua, from a purely creative point of view, no other work of Neo-vaisnavite literature could match the *Bargeets* or these devotional songs in this classical grace of expression and spiritual significance. He has compared them to the Buddhist songs or the *Caryapadas* composed during the 11th and 12th centuries because of the depth of inspiration and sincerity which they convey so transparently. A sense of surrender or supplication primarily manifesting the dasyabhava, that is, the attitude of a selfless and faithful servant towards his master expressed in the serenely meditative mood is the hallmark of these compositions, something that makes them central to the evocation of the spirit or the essence of Vaisnavism in Assam.

While tracing the development of Assamese prose Birinchi Kumar Barua noted it in the *Ankia* play itself although it was also developed in the writings of Bhattacharya (1558-1638) in the sixteenth century. As he has mentioned it was Bhattacharya who gave a start to Assamese prose literature in the Assamese earlier than most other languages in India. This early development of prose, no doubt, makes a distinctive feature of the Assamese literary tradition.

In his *History of Assamese Literature* (Sahitya Akademi 1964) and the earlier *Assamiya Katha Sahitya* (1950) Birinchi Kumar Barua has discussed the distinctive styles of old Assamese prose, particularly the prose of the *Katha Guru Carita* which contain hagiographics dealing with the lives of saints and vaisnava preachers. These hagiographics contain an account of the discourses given in religious gatherings, recorded afterwards in the language spoken in the Satras or the monastic institutions of the Vaisnava faith in Assam. The easy conversational

style of these hagiographical writings has no doubt provided an important aspect of the development of prose literature.

Another distinct style of prose is to be found in the historical literature. The *Buranjis* or the Chronicles written in the Assamese language since the 17th century bring out another important aspect namely, the development of secular prose literature in Assamese. Birinchi Kumar Barua has noted how the *Tai* language, the language originally spoken by the Ahom rulers in Assam before they adopted the Assamese language had also brought something special like the word *Buranji* itself. The missionaries in Assam in the 19th century made a notable contribution to the development of Assamese prose in the 19th century by translating the *New Testament* into Assamese language but more than that by encouraging a group of writers to write in Assamese using new words or syntax and the racy idiom of the spoken language in their prose writings. Birinchi Kumar Barua has given an evaluative account of this effort at a crucial period showing the limitation as well as the historical importance of their contribution in relation to the development of modern Assamese prose.

Coming to the modern period, Birinchi Kumar Barua has significantly stressed Bezbaroa's affinities both with the Assamese heritage as well as with the liberating spirit of the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century. He has analysed the transforming quality of the imagination, a characteristic of romanticism in the foremost creative writers like Bezbaroa and Chandra Kumar and has shown how this creative faculty continued to build upon the musical and folk tradition.

It is significant that while discussing the development of the short story in Assamese, Birinchi Kumar Barua finds the contribution of Laksminath Bezbaroa to be quite unmatched. According to him Bezbaroa's originality lies in his deep knowledge of the life of the Assamese peasantry or of the common men and women he wrote about in his stories. Here

Bezbaroa's humanism or the originality of his insights is not at all in conflict with what is local or typical or of a particular period as he could place them on a universal or a wider frame of reference, because of the creative insight implicit in his humanism.

It is a fact of literary history that not only the content but the form of a literary medium has to change with times; this is truer in respect of the post-war period. Birinchi Kumar Barua's own creative work in writing, his first novel put Bezbaroa behind and his short stories, written even earlier than his novel, have been a development in a new direction. But the awareness of a sense of literary tradition, one comes across in his literary and critical writings, is the same as that of Laksminath Bezbaroa and Bani Kanta Kakati. An understanding of this continuity in a living cultural tradition should no doubt be able to place modern Assamese literature and contribution of Birinchi Kumar Barua in the proper perspective.

## Contribution to Folklore Studies

Birinchi Kumar Barua made a notable contribution to folklore studies in Assam. But he was not a complete folklorist in the sense of a specialist undertaking research or field studies on a specific culture or community. He came to folklore through his study of the languages and literature as well as of the popular folk traditions which are connected with them. He also approached the subject through his awareness of the epic tradition of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Jataka* Stories, for instance. Added to this was his close observation of the Assamese society and its native folk tradition and his understanding of the variety presented by the ethnic landscape and the tribal lore of North Eastern India. His interest in folklore was life-long. Indeed the Professorship at the Indiana University in the United States was the culmination of his sustained interest in folklore and it is then that one finds him traversing a wider field and elaborating on some of his insights into the fascinating world of folklore.

Barua became the pioneer in organising folklore studies in Assam at the academic level. He founded the folklore archives of the Gauhati University and it later became a full-fledged department like any other. He encouraged scholars to undertake research on the subject. Dr. Prafulla Dutta Goswami's work, particularly his *Assamiya Jana Sahitya* (Assamese Folk Literature, 1954) and the *Tales of Assam* (1980) which are good introduction to the subject had the guidance of Birinchi Kumar Barua. Prafulla Dutta Goswami later earned his reputation as an eminent folklorist in his own right. But

the point to be noted is that it was Birinchi Kumar Barua who set up folklore studies on a solid basis at the Gauhati University.

Folklore in the past was treated as a subject coming under the humanities stream in this society but today it is emerging as a discipline with a methodology of its own and its scope is now much wider than what it was in early days. It has, like sociology, inter-disciplinary connections with a number of other subjects ranging from literature to ethnology and social anthropology. In this context, the following definition should be exact as well as comprehensive :

'Folklore since the mid-nineteenth century has been the collective name applied to traditional verbal materials and social rituals that has been handed down or at least primarily, by word of mouth and by example rather than in written form. Folklore developed and continues to flourish best in communities where few if any people can read or write. It includes among other things, legends, superstitious songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, nursery rhymes ; pseudo-scientific lore about the weather, plant and animals; customary activities at birth, marriages and death; and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings.' (A Glossary of Literary Terms : M. H. Abrams, Cornell University. Indian Edition p.12.)

One important feature of the oral tradition is that it is mainly in verse. Words are meant to be recited or sung according to set tunes on particular occasions of festivities or community rituals. In primitive, that is, preliterate societies the verse lines usually turned out to be a mantra or incantation replete with many suggestions of the magical belief and the ethos of the community. But as societies grow out of this preliterate stage, the language develops a literature of its own and the folklore elements undergo a process of transformation.

This transformation may be due to the influence of religion or other cultural factors. Many rituals may disappear or words may take on a new meaning in the process.

It is because of this process of change that one comes across basic differences between folklore systems in the same geographical region. In studying the folklore heritage of North-Eastern India, one finds a difference between two folklore traditions : that of the Assamese-speaking Brahmaputra Valley and the tribal folklores of Assam and of the North-Eastern India in general. The work of Birinchi Kumar Barua and his approach illuminates the interrelationship between the two streams of folklore studies and provides a kind of bridge between the two.

It can be said that an approach to folklore or folklore studies started in India in the 19th century. In Assam, a beginning was made in the last two decades of the 19th century but it was mainly for the sake of the new literature. The Assamese lyrical poetry of the period utilized the traditional ballads of the Assamese, particularly those which had a rich human content of the themes of love, suffering and death. The female characters of these ballads like Tejemala, Kamala Kuwori could be charged in poetry with a new meaning as images or symbols of suffering because their sad stories had been sung and listened to generation after generation by those who were not familiar with reading and writing. The folk tales or *Sadhu Koiba* in Assamese had also survived in the oral tradition through the same process. As is well known, two most important collection of Bezbaroa's stories, namely *Burhi-Air Sadhu* (Grand mother's Tales, 1911) and *Kokadeuta Aru Natilora* (Tales of a Grand father from Assam) are adaptations of the Assamese folk tales. Birinchi Kumar Barua in his writing (*History, of Assamese Literature* (Sahitya Akademi, 1964) has stressed this aspect. He also mentioned the strong oral tradition of singing in Assamese culture : the different categories

of songs in it like the Bihu Songs, sung during the annual spring time festivals, the marriage songs with a strong religious overtone sung as part of the marriage rituals, the lullabies and the *Deb Bichar Git* sung with one-stringed instrument; he also wrote about their functional importance in the native folk tradition and the literary qualities. Bihu songs for instance still continue to be composed by unknown composers and sung on the occasion of the Bihu, the major springtime festival of Assam. These Bihu songs as well as the more elaborate compositions of the *Bongbasha* in the same vein have all the life of the agricultural community. And on the other hand have an aura of sophistication about them. The sophistication is in the poetry not in the ritual itself or the dance movements which are a necessary accompaniment of the song.

Both Birinchi Kumar Barua and Prafulla Dutta Goswami spoke of the influence of the epic tradition of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* on the Assamese folk tradition. This is also attributed to the Neo-Vaisnavism which penetrated deeply into the village communities and the preliterate of illiterate masses right from the sixteenth century. Here is also an aspect of the development of the Assamese language which Birinchi Kumar Barua emphasised.

This oral folk tradition, rich, sophisticated and living has been a feature of the Assamese folk literature, mainly because of the cultural influences entering into it through the language or otherwise and also because the people have still retained the agricultural mores in life. Birinchi Kumar Barua has shown this closeness of the folk tradition to his important creative work: lines from a traditional folk poem in the very familiar oral tradition give a start to a section of the novel, a novel that in a way portrays the Assamese rural life in all its light and shade. The import of the folk refrain is delightfully and memorably woven into the story as the reader discovers.

Assam and the north-eastern region in India have a large

number of tribes with their distinct background. Many tribes in remote areas are still in the preliterate stage of civilization. A study of their rituals, habitats, customs, stories proverbs and riddles was initiated by British administrators like Mills and Hutton and later by anthropologists like C. Haimendorf and Verrier Elwin, who wrote several exhaustive accounts of the tribal myths of the region. A good deal of materials of tribal folklore was available in the process but there were obvious gaps in the information and also a large area still remained to be covered. Birinchi Kumar Barua wanted to bring a wider cultural perspective to bear upon these distinct folk-culture patterns with their different ethnic background, language and structure of beliefs and relate them through research also to the Assamese folklore of the Brahmaputra Valley.

When we come to compare the folklore of Assamese in the Brahmaputra Valley with those of tribal societies, we come across a striking difference but there is also a correspondence between the two streams of folklore.

We have already given a brief account of Birinchi Kumar Barua's *Asamar Loka-Samskriti* (Folk Culture of Assam, 1961). His objective here was to present as much information on the aspects of folklore and community life as current knowledge will permit without arriving at any rigid conclusion. Interestingly in the book, the writer gives an elaborate account of the habit of taking '*Gnwa*' or betel nut so common in Assam tracing it to the 10th century, when it was first mentioned in Pali literature. It has also multiple meanings according to the social context or the use to which it is put in Assamese society. In the Assamese society it means social respect to one to whom it is offered; it may also stand for a token of love or affection; the tearing of betel leaf implies in another community separation or divorce. He has also mentioned the cult of Snake or Snake worship in the folk tradition.

Myths and folk beliefs are to be placed in their social setting

in understanding societies which are still in a preliterate stage. On other hand, this can be possible if the rituals (including the incantations), the fertility symbols, the folk tales are properly analysed and understood. Magic plays a stronger role in their beliefs and according to Birinchi Kumar Barua the key words and incantation in 'tribal' folklore point to a Tibeto-Burmese influence in the language and culture.

Dr. Barua's stint as visiting professor of Indian folklore at the Folklore Institute, Indiana University opened up a new frontier of folklore studies. It appears from his own observations in his letters from America published posthumously in the form of a book (*Professor Baruar Chithi*, 1968) and he found the visit as well as the assignment most rewarding. He could traverse a very wide field drawing upon subjects of his chosen range and breadth and his deep knowledge of the Indian tradition of the epics and folklore helped him immensely. From his detailed account it was evident that he was alive to the need of updating methods of folklore studies in India and he found the methodology and the conceptual framework of the study of folklore in an American University very useful and relevant. He saw and realised for the first time the deep connection between folklore and the popular culture even in an industrial and urbanised environment in the United States. He observed how the latest research in the American Universities in sociology and social anthropology into primitive cultures had brought in many new ideas to modern American culture and in some cases, influenced social behaviour.

In a particular term in the University, his subject ranged from folk songs of India and China, stories from Ireland and India to Ramayana literature in Thailand and Valmiki's *Ramayana*.

At the end of his very successful tenure, Birinchi Kumar Barua was given the very prestigious academic assignment to prepare and edit an anthology of Indian folklore and an

Encyclopaedia of Indian folklore in two volumes to be published by the Indiana University. There is no doubt that his interaction with students in U.S.A. through his teaching and guiding advanced research on folklore as well as with some of the most eminent scholars and folklorists for nearly a year brought out his comprehensive knowledge and mature grasp of Indian folklore in its totality. His learning, method of analysis and the capacity to inter-relate and interpret diverse traditions matched the *existing standards* of modern scholarship.

## *Jivanar Batat* : Selected Readings from the Novel

Selected sections from the novel *Jivanar Batat* (On the Highway of Life) are translated here from the original Assamese. Three chapters of the novel are presented here in order to give an idea of the two remarkable aspects of the novel : the narrative skill and the characterisation. The women characters in Birinchi Kumar Barua's novel are particularly well-drawn, which make *Jivanar Batat* a classic in Assamese literature.

Krishnadutta and his friend are to leave by tomorrow morning. After tea and snacks in the afternoon, both of them have gone out for a stroll. Kamalakanta returned before it was evening. Krishnadutta stayed back to visit his uncle's house. Kamalakanta took off his shirt placing it on the hanger and opened the suitcase kept near the bedstead for arranging the clothes. He kneeled down to look at the clothes more closely. Two of the pieces are presents received in Aideo's wedding. Marriage presents are also meant to be distributed among close relatives. Aideo at the time of leaving for the groom's place touched Kamalakanta's feet and gave him a home woven towel with a floral design worked on it and a fine silk piece. Looking at the floral design Kamalakanta thought of the sweet relationship between a brother and sister and his heart had a thrill of joy.

At that moment, Tagar came there with a bundle neatly wrapped up with paper. Tagar thought that there was nobody in the room. As she was about to leave, keeping the bundle on the table, her hand came upon a chair nearby and made

a sound. Kamalakanta closed the suitcase and looked up. Tagar, about to leave, fixed her gaze on Kamalakanta, now. Poor girl, when she saw Kamalakanta, she stood back where she was. Placing the towel in the suitcase, Kamalakanta stood up and came forward. Looking at the bundle kept on the table he asked 'Is it a present for me?'

Tagar, shy and diffident, eyes downcast, did not say a word. Opening the wrapper Kamalakanta saw what it contained. A beautiful tablecloth with a fine embroidery. When he opened it further he saw the pattern, a flower and two buds behind a lotus leaf. Leaf, flower and bud—the yarn in each case being of a different colour. The artist who worked on that design not only knew in reality what has been put there but also had a fine sense of matching colours in an artistic combination. The surrounding creepers and the vine did express an inner feeling of the artist so beautifully.

Kamalakanta folded it slowly and asked :

'Have you brought it here to show it to me?'

'Oh, why should I bring it to show it to anybody?'

'Would you really like to part with such a fine piece and give it to some one?'

'I would not have given, if I did not like. When I worked on the design I thought of giving it to someone.'

'Why should I take so much trouble if it is for me only?'

'I hope, I do not happen to be that someone.'

'You may turn out to be him or you may not. Since you have received it, take it, I embroidered the flower for your sake.' Having uttered these words, Tagar was perturbed thinking of the meaning, which they could convey.

A powerful longing, half-understood or not understood

at all, stirred Kamalakanta's heart. Like the reed flute tunefully playing to the touch of the wind, his heart brimmed over with an unknown delight. In that frame of mind Kamalakanta forgot all about fear and hesitation, placed Tagar's hand on his and took off his ring and put it on Tagar's finger and it happened, as if, in a flash. At first, Tagar could not grasp anything at all. But she was reluctant to take the ring out once it was already on her finger. Trying to lighten the matter and give it a colouring of joy, Kamalakanta smiled and said : 'This is all I have to offer in return.'

Covering her eyes in embarrassment and weeping quietly, Tagar said, 'Why have you brought ruin upon me?'

Kamalakanta felt ill at ease. Fear and apprehension shook him now. He asked eagerly, 'Your ruin?'

'How will I show my face to people?' Tagar asked, still weeping. The reply removed the stone pressing upon her breast. Kamalakanta said slowly, 'I will see to that. If you so wish, you can return the ring.'

'No, it would not be proper to return the ring. But please, tell me, why have you humiliated me like this?' She could not say anything more. Sorrow and resentment choked her and her heart-beat was about to stop.

Drawing a long breath, Kamalakanta said :

'Love does not brook any consideration of insult or humiliation : will not wait for formalities : it has no day or night. Such a flood of love has come washing my being that but for drowning my self in it, who knows, I would have been kept waiting on the dry sands with futile hope for ever.'

'Why have you done this without telling my father?' Tagar's sigh of grief shook Kamalakanta.

Kamalakanta realised deeply how he had wounded Tagar's

sense of self-respect. When he found an ordinary girl having so keen a sense of self-respect he developed a great respect for her. What he could have sought for by the front door with dignity, he wanted to have stealthily by the backdoor bringing an unbearable burden of blame on his head—why? He took Tagar's hand once more in his hand and pleaded with her—whatever has happened, there is no point in sorrowing over it now. Man has his weak moments in life—that is why he is still flesh and blood, not an ethereal creature like god. To commit a mistake is wrong, but in trying to rectify it, there is merit. Admission of mistake may bring punishment but there is no disgrace.

He waited for a while and then went on emotionally, 'I will soon openly make penance for whatever wrong I have done secretly today. This incident today is not the expression of my mad youth, please believe me.' He loosened his grip slowly on Tagar's hand. Almost unknowingly Tagar bent and touched Kamalakanta's feet and rushed out of the room. Tagar casting aside her youthful liveliness was transformed into a woman of serious countenance almost in an instant. Kamalakanta looked through the window to the darkness outside. The silence of the evening became eloquent in front of him.

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Dharani who was looking for an opportunity to serve the cause of the country soon found an opportunity to do so. The freedom movement in the Roha area was led by Dharani. His house was filled up with volunteers, young boys and girls who would want a word of advice or some responsibility. In a few days, it became like a place of pilgrimage.

Service to the country in the eyes of the Govt. was an offence. The police always looked towards Dharani with suspicion because he was devoting himself to the service of the people. Men of the intelligence or the spies of the Govt. did not take long to find that Dharani was the leader of

the anti-Govt movement in Roha. But it was not easy to trace him. Advised by his co-workers Dharani avoided the police. When the police could not trace Dharani, they searched or harassed those who were close to him or used to go around with him.

The movement spread like an infectious disease : the police could hardly check it. If it abated in some village owing to the presence of the police, it started with renewed vigour in another village. The police Inspector at Roha was very much perturbed. His prestige gone, he could lose his job even. When he could not get hold of the main leader in the Roha area, he called his wife to the police station. Two red-turbaned constables speaking Hindusthani, came to Dharani's house and ordered Tagar to come with them to the thana.

Tagar, familiar with the police searches in the village, day and night, at all hours since the movement started, had much less fear of the police now. But a good woman from the village was not a thief or a robber and naturally considered it a disgrace to go to the police station. Unable to decide, Tagar took time to get ready. But once rebuked by the constables, she came out, fearing that otherwise they would drag her by the hand.

Drawing the veil over her face, holding Kamali's hand, Tagar started trudging her way to the thana a little ahead of the two policemen. Tears rolled down from her eyes in grief and resentment at the thought that her husband left her to face this torture all alone so that he could earn freedom for the country. Tagar considered torture at the hands of policemen to be worse than death and she remembered a few lines of the 'Kirtana' which she quietly recited now.

Sitting at the police station, the Inspector was wondering if he had done the right thing by sending for the wife of Dharani. As he raised his head, he saw a woman coming at a distance, followed by the two policemen. Why have they

brought the girl along with her? If the woman had alone come, he would have at least enjoyed saying a few obscene words to her. Once near the police station, Tagar drew her veil a little longer, turned her back to the police station and stood facing the highway. Casting a piercing look at Tagar's attractive figure, the Inspector asked her to go inside :

'Come on, come on. Who will bring you like a bride?' At the same time he asked the constables if she was Dharani's wife and he came near the staircase :

'Yes, Yes. Please lift your veil a bit. At least let me see the face.'

The Inspector's greedy look swallowed Tagar from head to foot. The villagers look upon the police with fear as if it was 'Jama' the god of death. The Inspector's words started a tremor all over Tagar's body. Hearing the second sentence with alarm, she became almost unconscious. Trembling severely with her hand holding her daughter's hand, she slumped down to the ground with her head touching her knees.

That an anti-Govt. volunteer and that too a woman could show such delicacy of self-respect was quite intolerable to the Inspector. He grimaced and spoke in anger to the constable in the verandah:

'Raghu Singh, catch hold of her. The sensitive plant is about to die.'

When the mother sat down all of a sudden Kamali was scared and started crying, keeping her head on the mother's lap. The Inspector was even more infuriated at this and spoke:

'You fools. Who told you to bring the daughter?'

His head, turned back a little, his belly pushed forward, he waited a bit and said, looking at Tagar :

'Enough! Enough : Don't you pretend any more. Lift your face! Where are you hiding your husband, under whose bed? A beggar wants to show off. Those who do not have two

square meals want to rise against the State. Yes, if want to fight, do so openly, why this going about behind the back like a thief?’

‘Come on, let me crush you with my boot.’ He examined the left side of his footwear to see if the iron stud was in position.

When the Inspector was busy talking to Tagar in this flippant way, he heard the sound of people gathering and speaking at a distance. The Inspector and the constables looked anxiously in the direction from which the noise was coming. Within a short time, a procession causing a kind of turmoil with shouts of ‘Bande Mataram, Bande Mataram’ could be seen moving into the Police Station. The clever Inspector quickly got inside the room and asked the door and window shutters to be put down immediately. In the meantime, a seemingly endless procession was coming towards the Police Station raising slogans and causing great commotion. Feeling a bit secure inside the room, the Inspector shouted at Budher Singh. ‘What the hell you are doing here, watching the fun? Go, ask them why they are shouting near the thana. A procession is banned : Tell them.’

Having done the shouting to them in broken Hindi and gathering a bit of courage, he opened some files on the table to impress the constables. Raghu Singh advanced slowly. The Inspector apparently concentrating on the files peeped through the door to see what Raghu Singh was doing.

When the villagers found Dharani’s wife coming towards the Police Station with two up-country constables it did not take them long to understand what it was all about. The word spread with the wind. Particularly at this time when the movement was on. The news spread from one end to the other like a forest fire. Like the Gopinis rushing out to have a glimpse of Krishna at the sound of the flute, men and women, even the children came out in a bid to rescue Dharani’s

wife from the clutches of the police leaving everything else aside. A procession took shape quite spontaneously.

The story took on new colours as it travelled from mouth to mouth. Some saw Dharani's wife being handcuffed with their own eyes. Others said : police dragged her in such a way that she had no clothes on her person. Some saw the police kicking at Dharani's small daughter. More the news travelled, it became more and more colourful like a many-coloured romance.

There was a commotion in front of the Police Station. Like excited horses in battle, the crowd pushed and pulled in order to lurch forward. The sky-rending shouts of the people almost tore to pieces the British flag flying over the office building. Many in the crowd shouted directions grating their teeth.

'Whom are you waiting for? Go, inside. Catch hold of the Daroga by the neck and pull him out. What audacity to drag a daughter-in-law of the village by engaging these sepoys who are foreigners in our land!'

As soon as the direction was given some broke the cordon and moved towards the compound of the Police Station. Alarmed, the volunteers begged them, with folded hands, to behave.

'Please do not forget Gandhi's teaching of non-violence. There is no place for force or weapons in the non-cooperation movement. Please remember, we are not here to inflict punishment on the Inspector. We have come to take back the wife of one of our comrades. A message has been sent to the Inspector through the constable to explain his conduct. Till we receive the reply, please do not cross the line.'

Having sent the message to the Inspector through constable Raghu Singh the volunteers were stopping the crowd from entering the compound. But as time passed, the crowd got restive. Unable to wait any longer, a few villagers, most of

them middle aged, came out of the crowd and rushed forward. Among them was Bhedu who looked first at the volunteers and then at the crowd and said :

'Ignore these volunteers baying like the fox and singing Bande Mataram. What's Swaraj for, tell me? A daughter-in-law from the Bayan family has been dragged out of the house in broad daylight by two cursed foreigners—and you are still shouting slogans in triumph on the road, forgetting everything. How will you show your face to Dharani if you cannot rescue his wife? Those who want to shout slogans, let them. Let us go ahead. Let us bring her back over the dead body of the Daroga. We are like the dust of the dog's feet—why should we be afraid of death?

On that day, Dharani was staying in a neighbouring village. Manohar went there quickly and informed him of Tagar being brought to the police station. That the police could go to such a length—Dharani had never imagined. Tagar whose shyness made her feel ill at ease *to come* before even her relatives had been dragged half-naked across the highway for everyone to see. How could she bear all this humiliation? She must be thinking of suicide. Where are the people gone? If the volunteers could not protect the respect of the daughters and daughters-in-law of the village, how could they bring Swaraj? Without a sense of self-respect, what could these weak people achieve even when they were set free? Dharani's resentment at himself and others increased more and more as he thought on these lines. In a moment, forgetful of the struggle for freedom and everything else, Dharani rushed to save Tagar from this insult and humiliation taking a bypass off the road across the paddy fields.

Dharani was stunned to hear the noise of the commotion near the police station. Almost all the elders of nearby villages and others not so old had come there. Kandarpa Kaviraj who used to spend the better part of the year in sick bed was

there with a walking stick. Striking the ground with the stick, he asked the people to go inside the compound. Every man had vengeance writ large on his face.

Tears rolled down Dharani's face in gratitude and joy. The villagers were by disposition quiet and peace-loving. They generally followed the dictates of religion, or of govt. or of society without questioning them. But once they were roused, nothing could stop them. Like the onrushing flood on a river in summer, they broke the barriers in a frenzied dance and moved forward.

Dharani went forward quickly and intercepted the crowd. Those in the front stopped suddenly, and those behind thought that they were afraid to move.

'What are you afraid of? Go, ahead. We will all die together. There is no purpose in living if the women of the village are tortured by the foreigners. It is better that such a village is ruined.'

Some of them craned their necks to see what happened. Those in front passed on the information. Dharani had come to surrender himself. As they went on talking to find out what the matter was, Dharani started to address them loudly

'I have come to surrender myself. Please do not think of vengeance but go home. You are deeply pained to see the insults heaped on my wife. For the sake of the freedom of the country, we should take such oppression as a blessing. We should be ready for greater sacrifices if the country is to gain freedom. There will be danger if you stay longer. You have been told about your responsibilities in this struggle. It is not the wealth of the rich, the strength of the powerful or the knowledge of the educated that will bring freedom. Freedom will be gained by the blood of the poor, ill-fed peasants of our land.'

People did not have the courage to defy Dharani. The

group in front retreated and all were now waiting for Dharani's wife. When the Inspector saw the people retreating and a man in Gandhi cap coming forward, he heaved a sigh of great relief. So long he had feared the worst, physical assault, or even death. Dharani looked straight through the door of the Inspector's room and said :

'Daroga Babu, you want me. Has a woman anything to do here?'

The Inspector, clearing his throat with a dry cough, said : 'No, no, the warrant is in your name. I sent them to enquire about you, but the Hindusthani constables did not follow what I said. I will place them under suspension. Please make no mistake about it.'

Now as soft as the earth drenched by summer rain, he asked after a while :

'Are they calming down? If you had not been here on time, there would have been firing. You have explained to them now—surely?'

'Why will they not disperse if you can convince them? The villagers are not as great fools as you people think. They are waiting to take my wife. If you allow, I can see her home.'

'If you do not take her home yourself, will it be...,' he did not complete the sentence but spitting at the corner of the room said in agreement.

'Yes, take her. Why should I mistrust you? But please, pacify the crowd with your persuasion.'

As the constables came out to the verandah, he said almost in whispers :

'Tell me, who does not want Swaraj? But what can we do? We cannot starve.'

Dharani smiled, his eyes betraying his contempt for all the cunning of the Inspector. Before he finished speaking Dharani came near Tagar. With the police in front of her

and the noisy crowd on the road, Kamali was scared so much that she kept on crying on the mother's lap. Dharani drew her close to himself and let Tagar walk in front of him.

On the way he explained to Tagar how service to the cause of the country makes one bear insult and oppression like a futile wind trying to move away heavy clouds were Dharani's words glorifying the country they did not remove the sense of humiliation or of utter despair from her mind.

Tagar did not say a word : like the sky heavy with clouds, she followed Dharani, looking grave and lifeless. Even after hearing the strain of patriotic fervour in her husband's voice her heart was washed silently by a sense of mortification at the indignities she had suffered.

\* \*

*Bihu*<sup>2</sup> is not over. The spell cast on the riverside is still there. What great mystery is there in the bosom of the Kolong even after one has seen the river a thousand times! At noontime and evening, the sounds of the drums floating along its banks still make the young men and women feel a despairing joy. And many a time they induce the young girls to do a dancing round keeping their pitchers on the bank. They put the orchids on their hairs snatching them from the *Ahar*<sup>3</sup> tree standing nearby. And the boys, what mad fun it is for them to swim in the swirling waters of Kolong in early summer!

The old custom of the villagers visiting one other at the time of the Bihu is still there. Their dear Bihu—none seems to like to bid it a farewell. In the afternoon, Tagar was returning with Kamali after a visit to Sunod's house on the occasion of Bihu. As she was about to pass the front gate, the peon, Meetharam asked her: 'Are you not Tagar Kalitani, Dharani's wife?'

Tagar turned her face a bit; she was chewing betelnut : 'Yes' she said.

'Here is your letter. It has come in care of Dharani.' Meetharam put the letter at the outstretched hand of Tagar and asked 'Can you read?' Meetharam thought that Tagar would ask him to read the letter. In that case, he could convey the news of Dharani's return to the village. When Tagar nodded and said 'Yes' he looked at her with a look of surprise and quickly stepped out of the house.

Tagar turned the envelope several times—looking at the address and opening the gate she came to the courtyard. She had received letters in the past but the handwriting in this letter she could not recall to have seen before. Like a luxuriant vegetation growing on the wet soil of summer even if the rains pour down only once, the letter brought a great deal of apprehension to Tagar's mind. As someone who has spent most of her life in sorrow and anxiety, one whose smiles turned to tears in to time, it was natural for her to shiver even if the leaves fall from a tree. Out of the fear of being worried of the outcome, she did not have the heart to open the envelope. Slowly she tore the corner open—as if a stone pressing on her chest has been removed. First she saw the address—Brindavan. How many people would not be thrilled or filled with emotion ! The sweet memories of hundreds of years are woven with this name ! Tagar read the signature at the end, without moving :Sri Badan Chandra Sarma. Tagar read the letter without change of breath and sat down in the open. She did not cry. Tears rolled down from her eyes. Kamali clasped her mother and stood like an image of stone. She was annoyed with Meetharam for having brought a letter which made her mother cry.

Bapuram Bora had visited Kasi, Badrikashram, Badrinath Dham and many places of pilgrimage and spent the last few months with Badan Ch. Sarma at Brindavan. He had been ailing for sometime. When he was asked to send information to his home, he said he had no close relatives. When he became very ill, he said that in the event of his death, information should be given to Tagar Kalitani through Dharani Kalita.

He did not suffer much. He had the name of the Lord on his lips till the last moment. The money which he had with him had been donated to Govindaji's temple as he had instructed. This was the gist of Badan Sarma's letter.

All the anger and disrespect for her father that had come from a sense of the wrong done to her vanished from Tagar's mind like a house on sand. For long Tagar had a feeling that her father would one day realise his mistake and come in search of her. Once again Tagar would be able to cry with her head on his lap. But the dream was shattered now.

Tagar sat motionlesss, her hand touching the forehead for long, crying till the evening, when she took to bed. Mother and daughter did not eat at all that night. Next day in the morning Tagar called Naoram Pandit, the Brahmin to her house. She placed a chair for Pandit to sit on in the courtyard and gave him the news. Pandit said consoling her : 'He had cast off his mortal body at Brindavan—is there a greater fortune? We do not have the means to take the ashes to the Ganga—your father's entire body is gone there. What a pure soul ! This type of death even the gods may envy! No, it is wrong to cry at this time of Joy.'

The Pandit continued, 'A daughter given away in marriage does not have to undergo much purification. Even then fasting when the parents or the elderly relatives die is good for the household. Let me have the letter. When did he die?'

Tagar put the letter on the floor : The Pandit took it up, read it and said to himself : 'On the 7th day of Bohag, Wednesday : Today, it is the 22nd day of Bohag.' He calculated on his fingers : 'Seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven—twenty two.' The calculation over, he looked up at Tagar and said : 'Well, today is the sixteenth day. In case of death outside one's own land, there is provision for getting it all over in three days. Take it from me, your impurities are already gone. Wash your utensils and call some elders for a Nam<sup>4</sup>—it will be all right. No need to perform special rites to ward off evil.'

She gave the horoscopes of Dharani and Karnali to the Pandit to examine within the month of Bohag. The Pandit opened a horoscope keeping it on one side and the almanac on the other and started to look at it closely. Looking at Dharani's horoscope, he said : 'The early part of the year seems good. He should be released in the month of Bohag.'<sup>5</sup>

Hearing the result of the calculations Tagar's face lit up with delight. His wrinkles now showing prominently, the Pandit said grimly :

'Towards the end of the year—Saturn rules. Health will deteriorate He will suffer greatly from sickness.'

When Tagar looked up to him very sadly, the Pandit said 'Who does not suffer from sickness? There is disease, there is cure also. Offer a Puja to the Goddess Kali of the South. Everything will be all right.'

Tagar found that the Pandit's prediction came true after a few days. News reached her that Dharani had been released. But he was ill. He could not come walking from the town. The Jail Officer had sent information to his home to send a bullock cart. Having received the message, Tagar entreated Sunod to arrange a bullock cart.

'Wait, how can you get a cart in the evening itself? We have a cart but the bullocks are not there. There is no hood also. The 'Ronga' bullock has refused to eat for the last two days ..... remains so quiet.'

'Will not Maghi agree to give him bullocks?' Tagar asked softly, drawing the veil a bit.

'Why not? He will give. But who will take the cart?'

'If the cart and the bullocks can be arranged, Joigu, Bhedu's son can be made to go.' Tagar waited to see if Sunod would bring in fresh objections.

'The well belongs to one. Another has the rope. The third one draws the water. All right, send a message to Joigu. Let us ask for Maghi's bullocks and take the cart. Let me get

the hood ready. How can you make the sick man come during the mid-day without it?"

Tagar had doubts whether Sunod would so easily lend the cart. Thinking that he might change his mind any moment, Tagar left for Bhedu's house as soon as Sunod had assured her.

'Oh ! One thing, do you hear? The bullocks will go for the whole night and return tomorrow. Some arrangement has to be made for feeding them.' He waited for a while and said : 'Do you have money?'

'How much?'

'Some thatch....also chaff. Jaigu will also need to buy some edibles...and at least one rupee.'

Tagar waited for the exact reply with her head lowered : 'Will need three rupees? Do you have?'

Tagar wished someone would bring Dharani flying by the night itself. Tagar knew well that once he was given the money, Sunod would hurry up to send the cart by the evening.

'I am bringing the money right now.' Tagar rushed home with these words. When she came back with the money, Sunod had already finished fitting the hood. He had also put a new rope. Joigu came with Maghi's bullocks straight from the field and readied the cart now.

Human life is like child's play. It *builds* but breaks soon after. One time it is up and then down again. One smiles, one also cries. Tagar dreamt a dream that night : amid the joy and sorrow, she is making a world of her own.

#### *Notes*

1. *Kirtana* : *Kirtana Ghosa* composed by Shri Sankardeva is one of the four principal holy scriptures of the Vaishnavas of Assam.
2. *Bihu* : Spring time festival of Assam.
3. *Ahat* : A banyan tree.
4. *Nam* : Devotional Singing.
5. *Bohag* : First month of the Assamese Calendar.

## A Man of Vision

Birinchi Kumar Barua passed away on March 30, 1964. His untimely death was an irreparable loss to the academic and cultural life of India as a whole, and of Assam in particular. He was a man of versatility, a sense of dedication and commitment to cultural values. His contributions as a creative writer, historian of literature, a scholar of Assamese language and literature are so varied and multi-faceted that he did earn considerable fame and renown in his lifetime. What is often not taken into reckoning are the qualities of a great teacher that he possessed, exercising a profound influence on the students, who had the privilege of listening to him in the classroom or sharing in his interests on many a subject. Some of them were, no doubt, beholden to him for what they have learnt in terms of developing an objectivity and a balanced approach in the field of comparative studies, whether it is literature, linguistics, ancient history or folklore. He was also very keen to take on and assimilate new ideas and information from any quarter as was evident during his teaching career, in India or abroad.

Barua had a brilliant academic career, which by itself, was not an unusual achievement. But it was his good fortune to study language, classical Indian literature and ancient history under the tutelage of scholars of the eminence of Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Dr. Beni Madhab Barua and Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, before proceeding to pursue his studies at the London University.

While teaching Assamese language and literature, he opened

up new frontiers and provided what may be termed as a model for teaching modern Indian language and literature. Dr. Maheswar Neog, the well-known scholar and former Professor of the Gauhati University writes :

“The subject could have been called comparative language and literature in consideration of the fact that Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, English and other foreign languages and literatures were included in the course for studies. Assam’s social and cultural history also came to form a part of the subject.” (Prof. Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume, p.iv All India Oriental Conference, Gauhati, 1966.)

In the same way, Barua adopted a wider and more eclectic approach when he set up the centre for folklore studies at the Gauhati University, a decade later.

On the other hand, he had excellent talents as a creative writer and was a significant novelist although the critics except Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati were slow in giving it due recognition.

Besides his preoccupations with teaching and research, Barua tried indefatigably to build up institutions of cultural significance in Assam. He established the Assam Academy for Cultural Relation in 1960 in order to:

- (a) strive for the emotional and intellectual integration of the people of Assam and India and to contribute towards the development of a progressive and creative cultural life in Assam;
- (b) work for the promotion of national ideals and the defence of fundamental human values through literature and other cultural activities, and for strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding among various communities of people living in India.

Barua was the founder of this institution which did laudable work in the field of promoting cultural integration for many

years. He had a vision of Assam and the North-East as an integral part of a great country. In his untimely departure, not only Assam but the whole of North-Eastern India lost a most distinguished scholar and someone who was not only dedicated but also had a clear vision of the future.

The Sahitya Akademi honoured him posthumously with the Akademi Award in Assamese for 1964 for his book *Asamar Loka-Samskriti* (1961)

Prabhakar Machwe, in his article 'Tribute to a Scholar and Creative Artist' has written at length on the achievements and the personality of Birinchi Kumar Barua. The following passage is quoted from that article as it provides a glimpse into his unique personality with a human touch.

"He was not only a scholar but a creative artist. He wrote some stories and two novels : *Jivanar Batat* and *Seuji Patar Kahini*. I was intrigued to learn that he wrote both of these works under pseudonyms Vina and Rasna. This was an interesting device to hide the authorship and enjoy seeing the critics, chivalry from a distance. He told me how he spent an entire summer vacation in hiding in a tea garden collecting authentic data and linguistic local colour for his second novel. He has many facets of his personality, which can easily claim for him the title of *Rasajna*."

*Tribute to a Scholar and Creative Artist in Professor Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume p. xxii All India Oriental Conference, Gauhati, Assam 1966.*

He was a really such a man. Above all, he was a man of vision.



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AKAN	ĀKĀN
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ASSAMIYA BHASA ARU SAMSKRITI	ASSAMĪYĀ BHĀSĀ ĀRU SAMĀSKRĪTĪ
CHANDRA KUMAR AGARWALLA	CHANDRA KUMĀR ĀGARWĀLLĀ
ASSAMIYA SAHITYAR BURANJI	ASSAMĪYĀ SAHITYAR BURANJĪ
ASSAMIYA KATHA SAHITYA	ASSAMĪYĀ KATHĀ SAHITYA
AGHONI BAI	ĀGHONĪ BĀI
ANANDA RAM DHEKIAL PHUKAN	ĀNANDA RĀM DHEKIAL PHUKAN
ASAMIYA JANA SAHITYA	ASAMĪYĀ JANA SAHITYA
BANI KANTA KAKATI	BĀNI KĀNTA KĀKĀTI
BIRINCHI KUMAR BARUA	BIRĪNCĪ KUMĀR BARUA
BHATTA DEV	BHATTA DEV
BEULA	BEULĀ
BONGHOSHA	BONĀGHOSHĀ
CHITHI	CHITHĪ
CARYA PADAS	CARYĀ PADAS
DHALPHAT	DHALPHĀT
DIMBESWAR NEOG	DIṂBĒŚWAR NEOG
DEH BICHAR GIT	DEH BĪCHĀR GĪT
GOPINATH BORDOLOI	GOPĀNATH BORDOLOI
GUNABHIRAM BARUA	GUNĀBHĪRĀM BARUĀ
HEM CHANDRA GOSWAMI	HEM CHANDRA GOSWĀMI
JATINDRANATH DOWERĀH	JATINDRANĀTH DOWERĀH
JIVANAR BATAT	JĪVANĀR BĀTĀT

JYOTIPRASAD AGARWALA	JYOTIPRASAD ĀGARWĀLĀ
KATHA KAVITA	KATHĀ KAVITĀ
K. K. HANDIQUE	K. K. HANDIQUI
KAVYA ARU AVIVYANJANA	KĀVYA ĀRU AVIVYAÑJANĀ
MADHAV KANDALI	MĀDHAB KANDALĪ
LAKSMINATH BEZBAROA	LAKSMINĀTH BEZBAROĀ
LAKHINDER	LAKHINDER
PARVATI PRASAD BARUA	PARVATI PRASAD BARUVA
PAT PARIVARTAN	PAT PARIVARTAN
PURANI ASSAMIYA SAHITYA	PURANI ASAMĪYĀ SAHITYA
PRAFULLA DUTTA GOSWAMI	PRAFULLA DUTTA GOSWĀMI
SAHITYA ARU PREM	SAHITYA ĀRU PREM
TAGAR	TAGAR

